

REFINISHING CABIN WOODWORK

Rick Lucas: *Ping*

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The off-season is a time to work on systems and the cosmetics of a boat. I'd long thought the 25 year old finish on the interior wood was looking a little tired. Having sailed on a couple of Swans, I was taken with the warmth of the beautiful wood in the cabin. Although I knew that Ping would never look like a Swan, I thought that there must be something I could do to make the wood more attractive.

As far as I could tell, nothing had been done to the bulkhead teak plywood, cap rails and other wood belowdecks since the boat was originally commissioned. The color remained good, but the surface was dull and lifeless. Also, the cap rails running over the bulkheads between the saloon and galley/nav areas and those surrounding the openings to the head and v-berth were quite rough with grooves that didn't feel particularly good under the hand. Clearly, I wanted to improve this rather ratty appearance. I divided the project into two phases. The first involved the removable wood, with the second addressing the permanently installed pieces.



I removed all the fiddles, strips and cabinet faces (v-berth and head) that could be removed and took them home. I first patched any nicks and dings with colored filler. I ended up using mahogany filler as I couldn't find teak colored filler. I then used an orbital sander to smooth each piece as necessary, finishing up with 180 grit sandpaper on a sanding block. This left a smooth surface that exposes enough of the grain to keep it visually interesting. I applied three to five coats of Minwax semi-gloss spar urethane using a broad foam brush, sanding with 220 grit between each coat. The exception was the nav table top which got about eight or nine coats because I wanted it to be mirror

smooth.

Once finished, I remounted all those bits and started working on the fixed wood. The procedure was much the same as with the other wood except I wanted to keep the dust down in the cabin, so I affixed the catch bag on the orbital sander. I started with 100 grit on the orbital and finished up with 180 on the sanding block. The application of the Minwax finish was the same as with the removable bits.

There were a few places where I wanted a thick and smooth protective finish. These were in the high traffic areas and places where one's hand might naturally fall. These included all the cap rails, the wood around the companionway and the nav table top. This required a little extra work. To each of these pieces, I applied at least six coats of finish to fill in the grain as I wanted it to look like the wood was encased within a finish, like a fossilized fly within amber. Once I'd built up enough depth, I started sanding the finish with 400 and 600 wet/dry to get it very smooth. From there, I used some car machine polish (applied by hand) from Griot's (www.griotsgarage.com) to knock the scruffiness off the finish. Regular rubbing and polishing compounds may have the same effect, but I'm not certain. An unintended consequence of this was that the finish was no longer semi-gloss, but that was OK. It set the pieces off against the rest of the wood.



NOTE: It's imperative that you have enough thickness in the finish before you get down to the final sanding and polishing otherwise you'll be polishing the raw wood... not good. To be safe, eight coats would be the best starting point for these pieces. Either that, or make absolutely sure that there's no raised grain left before you

start applying the finish. Also, don't polish wood that still exposes the grain. The polish I used would not come out of the grain and left a slight white residue. I'm sure there's a way to get it out. I just haven't figured out how yet.

I finished the job off by filling in the gaps between the bulkheads and the interior liner with indoor/outdoor latex caulking (from Lowe's or "BOB") to cover the corners where a brush wouldn't reach to apply urethane. (You can sort of see it in the second picture from the top.) I always thought that joints looked a bit unfinished anyway, and a trip to this year's Long Beach boat show showed me that modern boat builders used this type of materials to fill the gaps. I masked off the wood and filled the gaps in. The good part of this is that if you mess up and it dries, it simply rubs off the wood, and more easily from the gelcoat.

One final thought. Polishing the urethane on the rails and other high-traffic areas leaves a finish that feels so good... well, it just feels really good. It's worth the extra effort.

Things I'd do differently: Not polish the wood with something that would leave a white residue in the grain.

Cost: About US\$150.00

Time: 30 hours